

PROSPER: PROmoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience in Pennsylvania and Iowa

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Program of Distinction Category

- Healthy Relationships, Good Decisions (2)
- Health & Fitness (4)
- Youth & Adult Partnerships (5)
- Community Engagement (3)
- Partnership & Grants (1)

Sources of funding that support this program

- National Institute on Drug Abuse
- Penn State Cooperative Extension

Knowledge and Research Base

There is a substantial body of literature indicating the need for prevention programming for children, youth and families. As they approach adolescence, youth in the U.S. are confronted with a myriad of potential threats to healthy adaptation, including substance use (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990; Willis, McNamara, Vacarro & Hirky, 1996) and delinquency (Achenbach, 1991). Additionally, young adolescents experience a three-fold increase in depressed mood, as well as elevation of other mental health problems (Compas, Ey, & Grant, 1993; Kazdin, 1989).

The pre- and early adolescent developmental stages present a particularly opportune time to bolster youth competencies and build coping skills, thereby reducing risks for later problem behaviors (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Early adolescence is typically a period of substantial and stressful changes in physical, cognitive and social functioning (Caplan & Weissberg,

1989). With the transition to middle school environments, youth experience a marked decrease in adult involvement, support and monitoring (Eccles et al., 1993), and peers increase in prominence as a socialization force. These factors combine to increase youth exposure to risky situations and thereby contribute to dramatic increases in substance use and antisocial activities (Eccles et al., 1993; Simmons and Blyth, 1987). Concerned about the risks associated with these developmental transitions, families of young adolescents are particularly receptive to interventions designed to foster positive youth development, increase parenting effectiveness and improve parent-child communications. To this end, a growing number of preventive interventions have been developed that have documented success in building youth competencies and reducing problem behaviors, particularly through coordinated family-focused and school-based prevention efforts (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 1999; Spoth, Reyes, Redmond, & Shin, 1999).

Needs Assessment

Epidemiological data underscore a critical need for the diffusion of effective family- and youth-focused interventions designed to reduce risk for adolescent substance use and related problem behaviors. Statistics on prevalence rates of youth problem behaviors, ranging from substance use and violence to academic failure, are staggering (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Spanier, 1998; Weissberg & Elias, 1993). Dryfoos (1997) estimates that 65% of U.S. adolescents (14-17) are at risk, and states that all youth could benefit from interventions designed to prevent experimentation with risky behaviors. The need for competency-building interventions to address development-related risks is particularly compelling when the goal is to reduce onset of substance use. Extension educators agreed to participate in PROSPER based on identified local community needs for youth prevention programming.

Goals and Objectives

PROSPER (**PRO**moting **S**chool-community-university **P**artnerships to **E**nhance **R**esilience) is an innovative model for bringing scientifically-proven prevention programs to communities to strengthen youth and families. The PROSPER program's main purpose is to reduce rates of youth substance use and problem behavior and foster positive youth development. This is accomplished by teaching skills that foster improved family life and parent-child communication and providing students with skills for planning, problem-solving and peer resistance against problem behaviors.

PROSPER is a research-outreach initiative that links three existing infrastructure systems to provide prevention programming and enhance the resiliency of youth and families – the land-grant university, the Cooperative Extension System, and the public school system. By creating new linkages between these systems, PROSPER is designed to strengthen the expertise and broaden the resources of teams to implement coordinated school-based and family-focused prevention programs that enhance resiliency and decrease problem behaviors.

The goals of the PROSPER Project are to:

- Promote positive youth development & strong families
- Prevent youth substance abuse and other problem behaviors
- Provide quality implementation of scientifically-tested programs
- Evaluate the effectiveness of evidence-based prevention programs
- Identify aspects of community partnerships that are most important in producing positive outcomes.

Each of the four curricula selected by community teams has specific objectives to meet these goals. For more specific information about curriculum objectives, go to: <http://prosper.ppsi.iastate.edu/learnmore.htm>

Target Audience

PROSPER is a multi-year project including two successive cohorts of sixth graders in 14 Pennsylvania and 14 Iowa school districts and the communities in which they are located. Approximately 6,000 youth and their families in Pennsylvania are involved in PROSPER. This is a universal prevention program; therefore, all youth in the community were invited to participate.

Program Design and Content

PROSPER offered participating communities a menu of already proven evidence-based prevention programs. Community partnership teams pick from this menu to implement one family-based program (all sites chose *Strengthening Families Program 10-14*) and one of three school-based programs: *All Stars*; *Life Skills Training*; *Project Alert*.

Each community offered one school-based curricula during the school day taught by school personnel. Each curriculum is a skills-based alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) prevention program offered to middle school youth for 7-14 weeks. Local community teams selected the curricula based on local needs and community and school characteristics.

All seven communities implemented the family program, *Strengthening Families 10-14* (SFP) during the evening. The Strengthening Families Program for parents and youth is a scientifically-tested intervention program designed to reduce adolescent substance use and other problematic behaviors in youth 10 to 14 years of age. The sessions are highly interactive and include role-playing, discussions, learning games, and family projects.

Type of program

PROSPER is both a special-interest/short-term program for youth when they receive the school-based prevention curriculum *and* it is a family program where the youth attend with their parents during out-of-school time hours.

Methods used to deliver the program

PROSPER activities are coordinated by community-based teams that include: Penn State Cooperative Extension, school personnel, representatives from community service agencies, parents, youth, and community members. The school-based prevention curriculum chosen by the community team was delivered to the middle-school youth during the school day. Each lesson is between 45-50

minutes long and includes video discussions, role play, experiential activities and discussion among the students. The family program (SFP) is delivered over 7 weeks in evening sessions with sessions for parents, youth and families as described below:

- **Parent** sessions consist of presentations, role-plays, group discussions, and other skill-building activities. Videotapes are used for most sessions to standardize program delivery and demonstrate effective parent-child interactions.
- **Youth** sessions engage each youth in small and large group discussions, group skill practice, and social bonding activities. Topics are presented in game-like activities designed to engage participants and maintain their interest while learning.
- **Family** sessions use specially designed games and projects to increase family bonding, build positive communication skills, and facilitate learning to solve problems together.

Curricula and/or educational materials

The curricula being utilized in PROSPER are evidence-based interventions (EBIs) to promote positive youth development, strong families, and prevent youth problem behaviors. These curricula include Strengthening Families Program 10-14 (Iowa State University); Life Skills Training (National Health Promotion Associates); Project Alert (Best Foundation); and All Stars (Tanglewood Research Corp.) For additional information on each curriculum, visit the PROSPER web site at: <http://prosper.ppsi.iastate.edu/learnmore.htm>

Partnerships or collaborations

Three basic organizations and agencies represent the partners involved in the PROSPER model:

(a) land-grant university Extension System and personnel and prevention researchers involved in program development and evaluation

(b) elementary and secondary school system personnel (e.g., school-based preventive intervention coordinators, school counselors, curriculum directors, teachers, and principals)

(c) community providers of prevention, family, and youth services, as well as other community stakeholders (e.g., representatives of the juvenile court system, students, and parents).

These teams are directly responsible for prevention program selection, implementation, supervision and, ultimately, sustainability. Extension educators serve as leaders and facilitators of these local teams. School district personnel serve as local team co-leaders and provide the critical interface between local team decisions and school engagement and support. Local community service providers and other stakeholders round out the local team and are important if the team and PROSPER programs are going to be sustained.

Program Evaluation

PROSPER used a randomized experimental-comparison design for the evaluation. Seven communities in Pennsylvania were chosen as intervention communities and seven communities were “wait-list” comparison communities. Cooperative extension educators and school co-leaders participated in the team process interviews and also coordinated with the data collection team around the school-based data collection efforts.

In the first two years of the project (we are currently in year 4 of the research project), Extension educators formed seven community teams in PA and each community implemented a family-based and a school-based prevention program. All PROSPER curricula have previously demonstrated effectiveness at reducing youth risk and enhancing resilience. PROSPER youth and families are being followed longitudinally to determine long-term impacts of the program. Data collection is also ongoing, focusing on the effectiveness and sustainability of the community-based initiative and the community-University partnership.

Process

The process evaluation being conducted is to identify factors associated with variations in the effectiveness of the local PROSPER teams across communities. This evaluation examines relationships among local team processes, the quality of program implementation and program outcomes. Data collected are interviews measuring team members’ characteristics and perceptions of team effectiveness, interviews measuring agency and school perceptions of team effectiveness, interviews measuring prevention coordinators’ perceptions of team effectiveness, and measure of fidelity of curriculum (high quality implementation). One indicator of high quality team effectiveness is each team’s success in securing sustainability funding.

Process Evaluation Findings Thus Far

1. PROSPER sites are implementing the evidence-based programs with high quality as indicated through implementation monitoring.
2. Strengthening Families Program: 91% of the curriculum was implemented as designed.
3. All Stars: 94% of the curriculum was implemented as designed.
4. Life Skills Training: 89% of the curriculum was implemented as designed.
5. Project Alert: 88% of the curriculum was implemented as designed.

Outcomes and Impacts

The outcome evaluation of PROSPER focuses on the impact of the programming implemented in the middle school on the child and parent outcomes. These evaluations included yearly in-school surveys of students’ self-reported attitudes and behaviors regarding substance abuse, yearly teacher ratings, yearly collection of school records, including grades, attendance information and discipline reports, and yearly in-home family observations and assessments.

Outcome/Impact Findings Thus Far

1. PROSPER attendance rates for the family-based program averages 17% of all the eligible 6th grade families in communities compared to 1%-6% who attended similar prevention programs in other communities.
2. Overall, youth from PROSPER communities with SFP in 6th grade reported that their parents are using better child management practices, are more consistent in their discipline, use less harsh discipline (yelling) and have families that stick together and support each other more. These results show an effect at the community level (for the whole 7th grade, not only for SFP participants) (see Graphs 1-4 in Appendix). *Note: A large body of research suggests that building stronger families early in the teen years can help delay the onset of substance use, prevent substance abuse in the future, and prevent violent and/or antisocial behavior.*
3. A national economic analysis suggests that for every one dollar invested in this program, a community will receive an estimated \$9.60 return on their investment, in terms of dollars not expended on mental health and substance abuse treatment, juvenile justice interventions, and other costs incurred from problematic youth behavior.
4. Pre- and post-program evaluation of SFP participants from parents and youth:

Parents/caregivers reported that they have gained skills in the following areas:

- waiting to deal with problems with my child until I have cooled down;
- remembering that it is normal for children to be harder to get along with at this age;
- finding ways to keep my child involved in family work activities, like chores;
- following through with consequences each time he/she breaks a rule;
- finding ways to include my child in family decisions about fun and work activities;
- listening to my youth when he/she is upset; trying to see things from his/her viewpoint;
- talking with my child about ways to resist peer pressure.

Youth reported that they gained skills in the following areas:

- knowing one step to take to reach one of my goals;
- doing things to help me feel better when I am under stress;
- appreciating the things my parent(s)/caregiver(s) do for me;
- having family meetings to discuss plans, schedules, and rules;
- understanding the values and beliefs my family has;
- knowing there are consequences when I don't follow a given rule;
- sitting down with my parent(s) to work on a problem without yelling or getting mad.

Communication to stakeholders

Several important tools have been developed for communicating about PROSPER to stakeholders. A brochure and exhibit are available for Extension educators and schools to use to educate the community about PROSPER programming and the impact on families. A PROSPER talking points document and legislative impact sheet were developed to use with community groups, stakeholders and legislators to communicate information about the program, impact and seek sustainability funding. There is also a PROSPER web site for additional information about the project:
<http://prosper.ppsi.iastate.edu/>

Program Sustainability

During the third and fourth years of the project, PROSPER community teams focused on identifying and securing local funding to sustain PROSPER programs. Cooperative extension educators led this initiative through grant writing, organizing local fund raising activities, securing in-kind donations, and exploring the potential for program support through the school districts and local community agencies. The long-term goal is for PROSPER programs to become fully sustainable once the grant funding period has ended. Each of the local teams has been able to garner funds for sustainability. Indeed, over \$50,000 has been secured in local funding to assist with sustaining local PROSPER teams.

Replication

A replication manual for other states to use to adopt the PROSPER model and programs is currently being developed. Several states have indicated that they would like to participate in an expansion of the current project. Additionally, new sites within Iowa and Pennsylvania are preparing to adopt the PROSPER model.

Rationale and Importance of Program

A number of universal school-based and family-focused programs have been proven effective at reducing youth problem behaviors and increasing skills linked to resiliency. However, an important gap remains between the implementation of well-designed interventions in controlled prevention trials and the implementation of prevention programs in schools and communities. Evidence-based interventions (EBIs) have not been widely adopted in school and community settings. Furthermore, many prevention efforts implemented by schools and communities lack evaluation or evidence of effectiveness. Even when schools and communities implement EBIs, it is difficult to access the same levels of technical assistance, support, resources, and prevention expertise available in well-funded, controlled prevention trials. PROSPER is a model that has the potential to increase both effectiveness of implementation and sustainability in communities of prevention programs. Additionally, Cooperative Extension, with its national network of outreach could become an important partner in community-based dissemination of evidence-based interventions.

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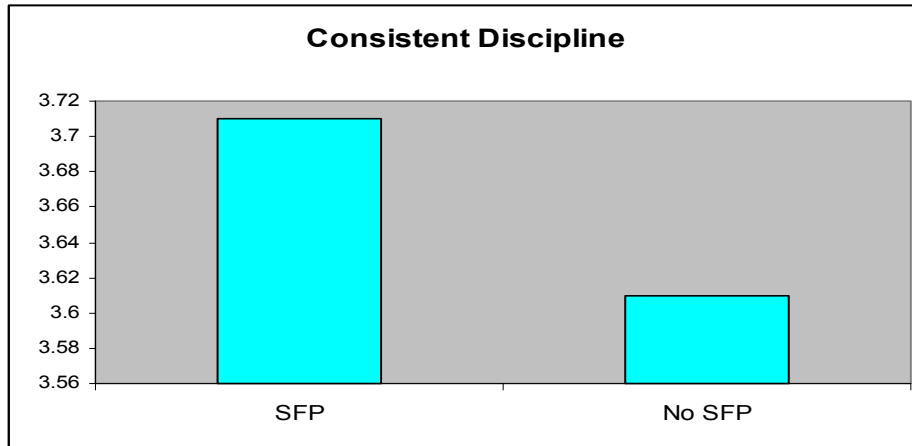
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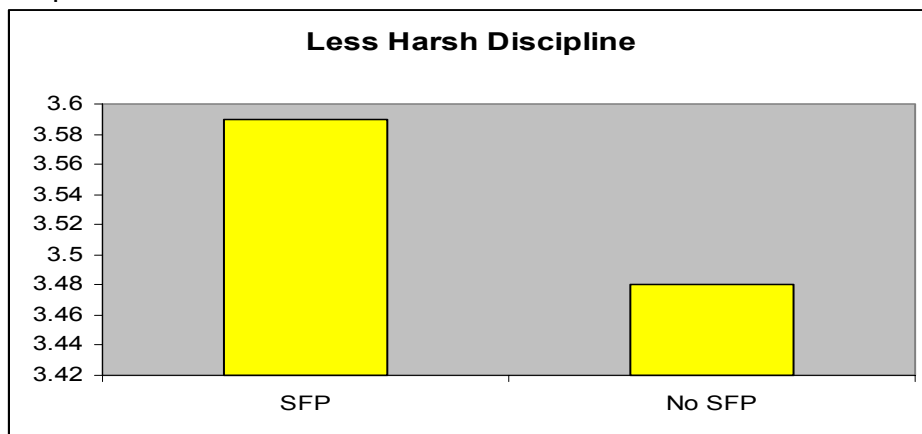
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Appendix

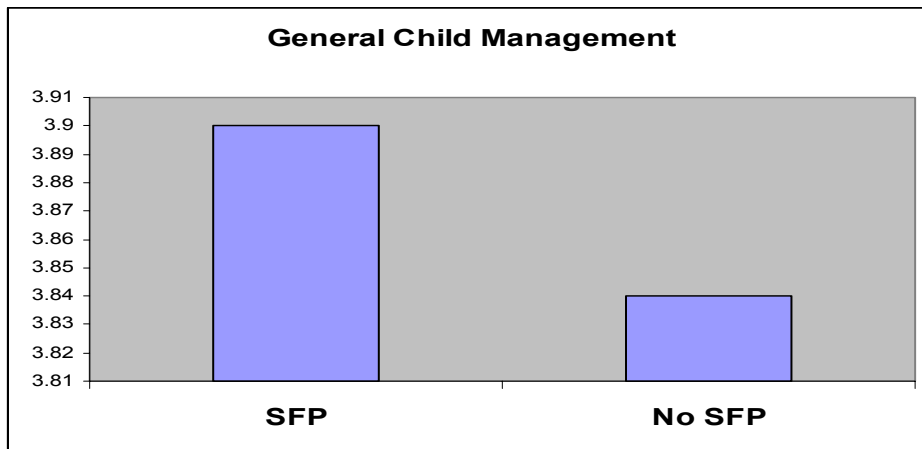
Graph 1



Graph 2



Graph 3



Graph 4

